

HR

WSD Personnel
Washington State
Employee
Assistance
Program

FrontLineSupervisor

Olympia 360.753.3260

A newsletter from the Employee Assistance Program

Seattle 206.281.6315

Spokane 509.482.3686

Toll Free 877.313.4455

March 2008

<http://www.dop.wa.gov/eap>

■ **I have several employees in my office struggling with eldercare issues that sometimes get in the way of work. Everyone knows about the EAP, but I don't think any have called. Maybe they don't know everything that the EAP can do for them. Can you elaborate?**

As the workforce ages and as life expectancy increases, the issue of eldercare increasingly impacts the workplace. The EAP has noted more employees presenting with eldercare concerns, and EA Professionals are always looking for helpful resources. Sometimes employees need coaching in how to share the difficulties they are facing at home. They may also need names of community resources or information on how to request reasonable adjustments in order to meet the demands of home and work. Sometimes people don't seek help because they believe their problems and concerns are fundamentally different from others who struggle with the same issue. The EAP provides not only practical suggestions for the caregiver but also a safe and confidential environment to express concerns to EA Professionals, who are skilled, empathic listeners. When one of your employees is struggling with eldercare concerns, contact with the EAP may provide them with much-needed assistance.

■ **Is all the talk we hear about workplace stress overblown, or is there something to it? After all, the workplace has always been stressful. What does the research say? Is there anything new to report?**

According to recent studies and research, workplace stress is a frequently cited reason people consider leaving their jobs. Employers acknowledge that stress is affecting business performance, but finding remedies can be difficult. Workplace problems, including decreased job performance, increased absences, and escalating health care costs increase when stress intervention is ignored. Job burnout, which results from excessive and prolonged stress, includes a variety of physical ailments as well as memory problems, increased cynicism, apathy, withdrawal and even suicidal thoughts. The EAP works not only with individuals dealing with workplace stress but offers stress management presentations that look at causes and signs of stress, the dangers of ignoring stress, and various remedies and self-care techniques. Stress workshops generally create active participation and responses. Contact your EAP to further discuss managing stress in your workplace.

■ **I referred my employee to the EAP, but at the time I wasn't concerned whether the appointment was kept. I saw it as the employee's business.**

If you call the EAP, and no release has been signed, the EAP will be unable to confirm your employee's participation. The chances are high that no release exists. The EAP may bring the matter to the employee's attention, but don't take a wait-and-see approach to whether a release is signed. Focus on what you are observing: an unsatisfactory absenteeism

The employee did go, but is still not showing for work half the time. Can I still get a release signed, or is it too late?

pattern. Nothing prevents making a second referral that includes advanced communication with the EAP, and a request that a release be signed. The employee may perceive a different level of seriousness and resolve, especially if the potential of disciplinary action is discussed. Many possibilities could explain what you are seeing, including delay or nonparticipation in the EAP's recommendations or the development of an entirely new situation with which the employee is dealing.

■ **Please explain why a well-educated, highly paid employee with a reportedly high IQ can't decide that he should phone the EAP as a self-referral to resolve his-drinking problem?**

Many people associate high intelligence and notable accomplishments with less likelihood that denial could interfere with the ability to recognize and resolve a personal problem. Unfortunately this is not the case. Mental health treatment professionals, and especially those with extensive experience in addiction recovery (where denial plays a prominent role), have observed that these things can interfere with a decision to accept help. Intellectualizing to avoid treatment is particularly challenging to confront in bright people with personal problems. What moves people to change is pain or perceived pain of some sort. The more tangible or intangible resources available to the troubled person, the more opportunity exists to avoid or postpone this point of decision. This is what makes intervention a useful tool to help ill persons in denial, and it is why a formal supervisory referral to the EAP has a high possibility of success, even for the most advantaged employee.

■ **I'm a concerned manager and want my employees to come to work every day enjoying what they do. I want them to feel like I am measuring up to their expectations as a great supervisor. How do the most successful managers accomplish this?**

Employees are valuable resources, and because they are paid for what they do, a partnership or contract exists to provide them with benefits in exchange for work. Frequently, management gets too stuck within this model trying to motivate employees by looking to tangible benefits and rewards to keep them happy and loyal. But, this is only half of the picture. The other half is an effective relationship employees have with the agency. That is also part of the contract, although much or perhaps none of it is in writing. The first-line supervisor is the closest representative of that relationship. Meeting employees' needs in this part of the loyalty equation requires things that are sometimes difficult to produce. They include getting closer to the employee by offering coaching assistance for career goals or helping employees connect with mentors. It is important to give employees lots of feedback and ensure that no "trees" grow between you and them by keeping communication channels open and demonstrating you understand and are empathetic to their needs.

NOTES